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10th MAS FLOTILLA

BB008

I have extracted the following points from the report on the interrogation of prisoners captured from MAS 504 of the 10th MAS Flotilla. This boat was sunk when making a torpedo attack on ANZIO. The remainder of the report is of purely naval interest.

"MAS 504 was based on LA SPEZIA and formed part of the 10th MAS Flotilla under the nominal command of Capitano di Fregata (Commander) Junio Valerio BORGHESI, who is already very well-known for his activities in connexion with Assault Craft. The operational command of the MAS has now devolved upon Capitano di Corvetta (Lt. Cdr.) Raffaello ALLEGRI, a former submariner and 2nd-in-Command at one time to ENZO GROSSI.

The boat was manned by a crew of 14 Italian ratings and two officers. Two Italian-speaking German ratings were borne for W/T and V/S communications. The Commanding Officer was 47-year-old Merchant Service skipper with experience of MAS in this and the last war.

This MAS left LA SPEZIA on the evening of 23rd March and proceeded under cover of darkness to PORTO SANTO STEFANO. Her Captain was new to her and the crew, as he had taken the place of her proper Commanding Officer (AMENDOLIA) who had gone sick, at short notice. It was the First Lieutenant's first patrol. One of the POWs, GARACCIONE, was himself a MAS C.O. but had asked to serve under FRESCHI the C.O. of 504 for this patrol.

From various statements made it would appear that the Flotilla does not consist of more than 11 boats in 3 squadrons, about four of which are occasionally operational at the same time.

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The following officers of the Flotilla are still serving in it under the Germans: BORGHESI-ALLEGRI-MAZZANTI-ARILLO-GRINATO-UNGARELLI-SCANDAMAGLIA-BARDELLI-DI AFFRATE-RICCI-BIFFICANDI; while the following "underwater" specialists are also with the Flotilla in one capacity or other: BELLONI (stone-deaf and 64 years old) COLOMBINO -BALOCCO- COIONTO.

FRESCHI maintained that DI AFFRATE, CARRACIONE (P/W) and himself were the three best MAS C.O.s left in the Flotilla. With the loss of 504, only DI AFFRATE now remains.

There are apparently about 200 officers still with the Flotilla, and the crews are mostly untrained.

P/W FRESCHI summed up the situation of the remnants of the 10th MAS Flotilla at LA SPEZIA in the words, "We have no food, no clothing, no supplies and no confidence". Everything is in short supply and is doled out in niggardly quantities by the Germans.

FRESCHI himself appears to have remained with the Flotilla owing to motives of misguided patriotism and personal dissatisfaction.

After serving for some months in the BLACK SEA under MAGLINO, where he won the Iron Cross, he returned to ITALY but was given no leave and posted instead immediately to MESSINA in command of a MAS. The boat was attacked by 2 Spitfires on 2nd August 1943, and he himself was wounded. The MAS returned to MESSINA and he went to hospital at AQUILEIA. On recovering from his wounds, he went home to ROME on leave and returned to LA SPEZIA on 3rd September. It was while on his way from LA SPEZIA to the MAS base at ANCONA with a convoy of lorries carrying dismantled MAS that he learned of the signing of the Armistice. He could get no definite instructions from anyone in ANCONA, so went by road to ROME where he saw Admiral FERRERI and wrote a report. He returned to LA SPEZIA via ANCONA and reported to BORGHESI, who gave him a command.

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When asked, he said he had no scruples about throwing in his lot with the Germans, since he felt the King had let his country down, and his conscience would not let him fight the Germans after being Allies with them for so long. He added that, if released, he would go straight back to serve in MAS again.

P/W's comments showed clearly how great an impression had been made on Italians in the North of ITALY by the statement published in the Allied Press concerning the proposed division of the Italian Fleet. Even the sight of Italian warships flying their own flag in NAPLES harbour and the statement on oath of an Italian Naval Officer well-known to him, hardly appeared to convince him, and he said that this move had done much to solidify anti-Allied feeling in Northern ITALY.

The case of P/W GARRACIONE, however, was slightly different, in that he had been given the choice of serving with the Italian Republican Navy or going to a concentration camp in GERMANY.

This P/W was very much more cheerful and light-hearted than FRESCHI, whose recital was frequently punctuated by floods of weeping.

There appears to be a good deal of internecine squabbling among the more senior Naval Officers in Northern ITALY: GROSSI for example appears to be out of favour with BORGHESE. The morale of the majority of officers is definitely low as they know they are fighting for a lost cause. As FRESCHI put it, "Ninety per cent of them had no choice, the remaining 10 per cent are hotheads ("esaltati")".

According to FRESCHI, MUSSOLINI still exists as a "force" but he is never seen and his influence on affairs of State is taken for granted."